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BASIC PROGRAMME OF WORK OF THE COUNCIL

Letter dated 30 January 1997 from the Permanent Representative of the Kyrgyz Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In accordance with rule 12 of the rules of procedure of the Economic and Social Council, I have the honour to request the inclusion in the agenda of the substantive session of 1997 of an additional item entitled "Proclamation of the year 2000 as the International Year of Mountains".

The decision to draw the international community's attention to the problems of mountain ecosystems, and on the proclamation of the year 2000 as the International Year of Mountains was adopted by the participants in the International Conference "Mountain research: challenges and prospects in the twenty-first century", held in Bishkek, the capital of the Kyrgyz Republic, from 14 to 18 October 1996. This initiative was supported by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Mr. Askar Akaev, in his address to the participants in the Conference and appeal to the United Nations General Assembly.

I also consider it important to note that, at its substantive session of 1995, the Economic and Social Council approved the report of the Commission on Sustainable Development on the work of its third session, in which, in its discussion of progress in implementing Agenda 21, the Commission recognized that mountain ecosystems and environments are of crucial importance as rich and unique centres of biological and cultural diversity, water stores and sources of minerals.

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My Government is prepared to submit the necessary documentation within the relevant time-limits and will take measures to ensure the cooperation of interested organizations and States Members of the United Nations in this initiative.

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annexes circulated as a document of the Economic and Social Council.

(Signed) Zamira ESHMAMBETOVA
Permanent Representative
of the Kyrgyz Republic
to the United Nations

Annex I

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

The International Conference "Mountain research: challenges and prospects in the twenty-first century" was held in Bishkek, the capital of the Kyrgyz Republic, from 14 to 18 October 1996. The work of the Conference was organized around the main branches of science dealing with research in the area of mountain ecosystems: earth science; the natural sciences; medicine, economy and education; and communications systems and exchange of information.

During this important event in the cultural life of the region, leading scholars from Europe, Asia and North America discussed a wide range of issues directly related to the vital activities of present-day people living in mountainous areas. Such issues included: human adaptation to alpine conditions, the general pathology and the curative properties of the mountain climate, distinctive features of the social environment and mentality of mountain peoples, and economic development and demographic stability in mountain regions. A broad discussion was held on such earth science problems as the geomechanics of, and natural disasters occurring in, mountain ecosystems; glaciology and water resources; the mountain climate and atmospheric changes; and the geodynamics and metallogeny of minerals. The participants in the Conference focused particular attention on vital natural science issues: the biodiversity of wildlife; limnology and the chemistry of water/snow; mountain flora; land and land utilization in alpine conditions; and environmental protection issues. Considerable interest was raised by the discussion of such problems of communications and information systems as experience in setting up and using the Internet in the region, the creation of a regional information infrastructure, the use of the international information network and the establishment of a regional data-transmission network.

The participants in the Conference recognized that the vital activities of people living in mountain regions involve much greater social and economic costs than in lowlands. In alpine conditions, all physical phenomena take place differently: the power of internal combustion engines is reduced, tension in power lines decreases, and the costs of supplying energy and foodstuffs are higher. The high probability of earthquakes results in increased costs of construction and other preventive measures. The participants noted the reverse impact of human intervention in the environment. The experience of geotechnical facilities built in mountain regions in the second half of the twentieth century shows that, in a number of cases, they have caused highly dangerous natural and technology-induced situations. Thus, the solution of the problem of the unity of the social organism and the alpine environment must be seen in the complex interrelationship of the conditions faced by humans living outside the "economic comfort zone".

We consider it expedient that the General Assembly support the decision of the Conference and proclaim the year 2000 as "International Year of Mountains".

Annex II

LETTER DATED 30 JANUARY 1997 FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

The International Conference "Mountain research: challenges and prospects in the twenty-first century" was held in Bishkek, the capital of the Kyrgyz Republic, from 14 to 18 October 1996 on the initiative of the Government of Kyrgyzstan. Leading scholars from mountainous countries of Asia, Europe and America who have long engaged in mountain research participated in the work of the Conference.

At the theoretical level, the Conference scientifically established the organic interrelationship between the natural state of mountains and climatic conditions arising in mountainous areas, on the one hand, and the disruption of the ecological balance and level of social and economic development of peoples living in mountainous areas, on the other.

Mountain ranges and masses in and around the national territories of States serve as an indicator of the health and material circumstances of whole generations of peoples inhabiting such territories.

At the practical level, the Conference considered that its ultimate aim should be to prepare recommendations concerning the manageability and interaction of mountains and economy in the interest of sustainable human development.

Considering that mountains contain resources of vital importance to modern man and are a powerful reserve of the progress of civilization, as well as a source of emergency situations, the Conference adopted a decision to draw the international community's attention to the exceptional importance of mountain masses for mankind and to propose that the United Nations General Assembly declare an "International Year of Mountains".

The international community's attention to this global problem, and the coordination and adoption of an appropriate programme of collective preventive measures, would do much to neutralize or reduce the negative impact of mountain-climate cataclysms on human lives, and would promote the sustainable economic development of mountainous countries and mountain peoples.

I should be grateful if the United Nations supported this important initiative of the International Conference in Bishkek.

(Signed) A. AKAEV